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SUBJECT: Former Secretary of Education Spellings Visits Portugal

¶1. SUMMARY. On her first trip to Portugal, April 15-19, former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings highlighted common concerns and challenges in education, stimulating debate among Portuguese stakeholders about possible solutions. She engaged both education professionals and leaders in Portugal's business community for a comprehensive discussion of both public and private sector efforts in that area. END SUMMARY.

¶2. In recent years, post has worked closely with the Portuguese Forum for Freedom in Education to promote events, discussion and debate on how to address common and universal challenges in education. Previous visitors include the former Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, who spoke about that state's efforts to reform public schools; and Professor Charles Glenn from Boston University who spoke about the Charter School movement in the US.

¶3. During her visit, Secretary Spellings was the keynote speaker at a conference on educational reform where she discussed US efforts at the federal level, focusing on the "No Child Left Behind Act." The conference was held at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon and attended by 130 senior Portuguese officials and education professionals. Secretary Spellings and two prominent Portuguese commentators reviewed US and Portuguese policies and offered thoughts and cautions on lessons Portugal might learn from the American experience.

¶4. Secretary Spellings also met with the Portuguese Minister of Culture for a wide-ranging discussion of education and culture, and later she met with Portuguese business leaders to review the topic of public-private partnerships.

¶5. Secretary Spellings gave two press interviews, one with a leading daily newspaper "Publico" which ran a one-and-a-half-page interview on April 18; and the other with an international affairs TV program that ran the following week. The "Publico" article noted Spellings' commentary on 'No Child Left Behind' and the importance of good data on student achievement and teacher performance so that administrators can make mid-course corrections and improve results.

¶6. COMMENT. Portugal's education system is broken. Students do not get enough schooling --or enough quality schooling-- to thrive in the modern global economy, and this is impeding Portugal's economic progress and the competitiveness of Portuguese industry. Secretary Spellings' comments were eagerly received here by policy-makers and education professionals keenly aware of the need to make rapid improvements to all levels of Portuguese schools. This visit was part of our ongoing effort to contribute to the dialogue and spur discussion that might lead to progress in Portugal. END COMMENT.

STEPHENSON